

By Jean Marbella

At a memorial service that celebrated both his landscape-altering legacy and his big-hearted if crusty-shelled persona, the William Donald Schaefer nation gathered one last time on Wednesday — friends and one-time foes alike, Maryland politicians past and present, Baltimoreans who shared his undying love for the city.

"Don Schaefer was a person who changed politics," former Rep. Kweisi Mfume said at a funeral for the former mayor, governor and comptroller that drew both tears and laughter at Old St. Paul's Episcopal Church in downtown Baltimore. "He put a human face on it."

The historic church was filled with leaders in Maryland politics, business and community life: Gov. Martin O'Malley, Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake, the state's congressional delegation and Baltimore City Council members joined many of their predecessors — and perhaps some who would succeed them as well.

Among them were former governors Marvin Mandel and Robert L. Ehrlich Jr.; former mayors Sheila Dixon and Thomas J. D'Alesandro III; current and former lieutenant governors Anthony Brown and Michael Steele; former and current attorneys general J. Joseph Curran Jr. and Douglas F. Gansler; Maryland Speaker of the House Michael E. Busch; Comptroller Peter Franchot; Chief Judge Robert M. Bell of the Maryland Court of Appeals; former U.S. Sen. Paul Sarbanes; and former and current Baltimore County executives James T. Smith Jr. and Kevin Kamenetz.

They were joined by CEOs Edwin F. Hale Sr. of First Mariner and Mark R. Fetting of Legg Mason, lobbyist Bruce Bereano, Cardinal William H. Keeler, Archbishop Edwin O'Brien and beloved Baltimore Colt Lenny Moore. The former football player last saw Schaefer when he was hospitalized with pneumonia at St. Agnes Hospital about a month ago.

"He hollered out to me from the bed, 'Spats, Spats,'" Moore said of the nickname he got for the way he tapped down his high-top shoes. "He was just grinning from ear to ear."

After the service, in which speakers such as close aide Lainy LeBow-Sachs and U.S. Sen. Barbara A. Mikulski shared poignant and funny memories of the often irascible Schaefer, many were similarly smiling as broadly. Spilling out onto Charles Street, where crowds of onlookers had gathered, there were reunion-like hugs, chatter and reminiscences among those whose lives and careers had intersected with Schaefer during his nearly five decades in public office.

"I think it was a wonderful service that celebrated an extraordinary life," said Rep. Steny H. Hoyer. "This is a person who genuinely, deeply, passionately cared, not just for the city, or the state, but for the people."

"He was a warm and compassionate human being who sometimes hid it very well."

As they have since Schaefer's death April 18, the memories flowed freely and fondly. Freeman A. Hrabowski III, president of the University of Maryland. Baltimore County, said Schaefer last visited the campus about a year ago.

"He sat by the Walter Sondheim statue," he said, referring to the Schaefer compatriot and hero of Baltimore's downtown revitalization, "and he held his hand."

Students walking by were excited to meet him, Hrabowski said, delighting Schaefer, who at that point had been out of office and the public eye for several years. "They really love me," Hrabowski recalled Schaefer saying in a tone of wonder. "He was so touched."

That the service was held in the midst of the downtown that Schaefer, Sondheim and their partners rebuilt wasn't lost on those who helped carry out their vision. Mark Joseph, who was Schaefer's development director, paused before entering the church to gaze at the nearby Park Charles high-rise apartment building, which was constructed under his watch.

Joseph recalled Schaefer ordering him to quickly raise money and find a sculptor to create a statue of former Mayor Thomas J. D'Alesandro Jr. for Charles Center. "That's how he operated," said Joseph, who also served as the city school board president and deputy housing commissioner under Schaefer. "When something was on his mind, nothing would stop him."

"How dare he die," Joseph added wryly. "I'm very angry at him."

Schaefer's former mayoral and gubernatorial aides reunited to plan the three-day sendoff that began with Monday's crowd-drawing tour of city landmarks and neighborhoods. The skills they learned in his demanding offices, it seemed, served them well in this final endeavor for the boss — to the point that even the weather seemed to bend to their will.

On a partly overcast morning, the sun broke through just as Schaefer's casket emerged from City Hall for the trip to the church.

Heralded by police color guards, motorcycle units and a pipe-and-drum corps, the procession arrived at the church, and the flag-draped casket was carried in by pallbearers as a Maryland National Guard band launched into a jaunty "Stars and Stripes Forever."

Inside, several hundred mourners, some of whom lined up outside the church as early as 7 a.m. for the 11 a.m. service, sat in the glow of stained-glass windows and were welcomed by the Rev. Mark Stanley. They listened to music, by the Maryland Boychoir and the Morgan State University Choir and others, and readings by former aide Mark Wasserman, Schaefer's former chief of staff; close political ally Nancy S. Grasmick, the state schools superintendent; and Ron Rogers, a former city employee who became Schaefer's close friend and neighbor at the Charlestown retirement community.

"This is the day William Donald Schaefer was elected to the highest office obtainable," Rogers

said afterward, smiling and raising his eyes to the sky.

To appreciative chuckles, the eulogists recounted anecdotes about Schaefer's famously bristly personality.

"The first time he yelled at me, slammed the door and wouldn't talk to me for a week, right then and there I knew he liked me," LeBow-Sachs said.

LeBow-Sachs said Schaefer was a father to his aides, stern but determined to pull every "shred of untapped potential" out of them. But one offspring was his most beloved, she added.

"Baltimore was his favorite child," she said. "If you dared talk negative about Baltimore, he would go nuts."

Both she and Mikulski imagined how even more demanding the writer of "action memos" could have been had BlackBerrys been around during his mayoral years. But, Mikulski noted, he still would have been the Don Schaefer of hand-to-hand politicking.

"How many of us have been at a church supper and seen Schaefer sitting there?" she asked, going on to list the ravioli suppers and sour beef dinners and pancake breakfasts and fish fries that he would attend — not for the food but for the chance to rub elbows.

"He loved the front steps. He was grouchy because they invented air-conditioning," Mikulski said, recalling how Schaefer would go "door-to-door and say, 'Hi, what's going on?'"

Mikulski, a city councilwoman when Schaefer was mayor, remembered speaking with him right after she was elected to the Senate to ask what he needed. "Bucks to Baltimore!" Mikulski said, quoting Schaefer's attitude. "'The buck stops here, and the more the better.'"

Drawing the biggest laugh and a round of applause was Mfume's remembrance of the head-butting relationship he and others had in the past with Schaefer.

"No one irritated me more than him, and nobody irritated him more than me," Mfume said. "Well, maybe Parris Glendening."

Mfume said they were so antagonistic, Schaefer used to call him Councilman Muffin. But, Mfume said, when he was headed to Congress and Schaefer to the governor's office, they buried the hatchet.

In the way of two old fighters, they became close, Mfume said, recalling two experiences in which he saw the "shy and very private" Schaefer break down in tears after his heart was broken: When the Colts left town and when his mother was buried from the same church.

In what was an often poetic eulogy that gave a nod to everyone from Shakespeare to Ted Kennedy, Mfume began by quoting Robert Frost's "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening." He ended with the same poem as he left the lectern, pausing to pat Schaefer's casket as he

returned to his seat.

Moments after the service ended, Beverley Koehler-Schmidt, 46, of East Baltimore rushed out of the overflow space set up at the Tremont Grand hotel next door to the church, where she and several dozen others watched the service on a projection screen. She wanted to see the casket of the man whose administration she credits with helping her out of homelessness in the mid-1980s.

"They aren't going to get a better person than that," she said. "He was a beautiful person in life. He will be missed."

From the church, some headed to Dulaney Valley Memorial Gardens in Timonium, where light showers fell on the sweeping lawns. As the Fire Brigade Pipes & Drums of Greater Baltimore played and beat a slow cadence, the cortege arrived; among those escorting the hearse was a riderless horse, symbolizing a fallen leader.

Soldiers and airmen from the Maryland National Guard carried Schaefer's casket to a grassy courtyard at the mausoleum. As it arrived, Guardsmen fired a thunderous, 19-gun salute by four howitzers as the 229th Army Band played.

The casket was placed on a bier in front of a tent sheltering 10 of Schaefer's close friends. About 120 people, including O'Malley and Brown, stood just behind the tent.

The casket team then lifted the American flag from Schaefer's casket as Stanley began the brief service of committal. A three-volley rifle salute followed, and then a bugler played taps. The flag from the casket was presented to LeBow-Sachs by Maj. Gen. James A. Adkins, adjutant general of the Maryland National Guard.

Schaefer's remains were later interred in a mausoleum, next to longtime companion Hilda Mae Snoops, who died in 1999.

For those he left behind, particularly former aides and those who succeeded him in office, there was a sense of the big shoes that they are inspired to fill.

"It made me proud to be a Marylander," Rawlings-Blake said after the service. "I was just thinking, 'I hope he thinks it was enough, that it was big enough and grand enough.'"